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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: LOCAL GOVERNANCE DIRECTORATE
CONCERNED ABOUT PARTISAN IMAGE

REF: A. KABUL 812
[1](#)B. KABUL 637

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: At an April 13 meeting with the DCM, Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) Deputy head Barna Karimi expressed concern that both Afghans and International Community representatives in Kabul now view the IDLG as highly partisan and focused on President Karzai's re-election. He insisted this impression is false and asked for advice on how best to go about changing perceptions. Karimi also asked for -) and received -- clarification with regard to rumors circulating to the effect that the U.S. plans to dispatch thousands of civilians to the provinces and set up offices there. He indicated he hopes to complete a full draft concept paper for governor-led reconciliation in the coming days and plans to share and discuss it with the Embassy prior to passing it on further to the rest of the International Community. Finally, he reiterated IDLG concerns over the delay of expected U.S. funds for the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP). End Summary

IDLG a Re-Election machine?

[1](#)2. (SBU) During his farewell call on outgoing DCM Dell, Karimi noted that practically every contact he has these days with embassies in Kabul (aside from the U.S.) involves hardly veiled comments about the IDLG,s purported efforts on behalf of President Karzai,s re-election. He insisted this perception is false and expressed frustration that it is detracting from support for the IDLG,s ongoing efforts to improve sub-national governance. Noting his agency,s lack of public relations expertise as only part of the problem, he solicited suggestions on how the IDLG could So long as governors and district administrators remain political appointees, it is difficult to imagine how the situation could be otherwise. It will be telling to see whether any of the suggestions offered up for the IDLG to help maintain a level playing field are implemented. In any event, we continue to believe it is worthwhile to offer help to properly directed and monitored IDLG sub-national governance initiatives. End Comment.
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positions but stressed that it is still in the discussion phase. As far as offices are concerned, he pointed to prospects for setting up a symbolic U.S. presence in the north and west.

Funding Concerns

¶5. (SBU) Karimi raised continuing concerns over the delay of U.S. funding for ASOP programs in Ghazni, Kapisa and Logar, resulting in a delay in the rollout in those provinces. He also expressed worries about continued U.S. bridge funding for the ongoing ASOP program in Wardak province (USAID clarified that U.S. funding for Wardak is assured through the end of May, with funds for additional months identified). DCM assured Karimi that ASOP and other IDLG funding requests are getting the serious consideration they deserve in Washington, but the new team needs time to review the proposed projects to make sure they fit with the updated U.S. strategy for Afghanistan.

Ongoing IDLG Action to Strengthen Sub-national Governance

¶6. (U) According to Karimi, the IDLG is making good progress on implementing plans for basic orientation for sub-national level officials. It has just completed its seventh and final orientation/evaluation conference for district administrators, with the series of conferences collectively attended by all but 36 chiefs of the country, 364 official districts. The IDLG will soon be publicizing the findings of its inventory of sub-national resources, information largely gleaned through these conferences. Karimi indicated that approximately 100 district administrators failed to meet minimum requirements and will need to be replaced at some point.

¶7. (U) Next on the agenda for the IDLG will be a series of conferences for the country's governors and the start of similar sessions for the country's 153 mayors. In anticipation that half the provincial council members will be re-elected, the IDLG also wants to conduct training for PC members, both to derive some lessons learned from those currently serving as well as to provide some guidance on the nature of the PC's expanded responsibilities under the new sub-national governance policy.

¶8. (SBU) Karimi complained of constant attempts (sometimes successful) of members of Parliament to interfere in sub-national appointments (Popal has voiced identical complaints) ref a), particularly of district administrators. He is now attempting to come up with a new, merit-based appointments mechanisms, ideally involving the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, that would be intended to blunt such outside influence. He lamented that the current mechanism, with the participation of the Senior Appointments Panel, is ineffective in doing this. At the same time, he would also like to institute fixed terms of appointment (possibly three years) to give incumbents a stake in doing a good job. The IDLG is likely to look to the U.S. and others for support for this initiative.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: We credit Karimi and others at the IDLG with sincerely trying to improve governance at the sub-national level. At the same time, we hear too many reports about actions by Popal and others in government in furtherance of the President's re-election to believe that the IDLG and its cadre of sub-national officials are totally above the fray. So long as governors and district administrators remain political appointees, it is difficult to imagine how the situation could be otherwise. It will be telling to see whether any of the suggestions offered up for the IDLG to help maintain a level playing field are implemented. In any event, we continue to believe it is worthwhile to offer help to properly directed and monitored IDLG sub-national governance initiatives. End Comment.
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